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(The following article appeared in the Anniversary issue of the Duxbury Clipper, May 31, 1990. — Ed.)

A Day in the Life of a Teenager...in 1918

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Rising time was always 6 am, 7 days a week, rain or shine – winter or summer. The first job was to build a fire in the kitchen stove from kindling piled in the woodbox the night before. Then a large saucepan (enough for 10 persons) was filled and a proper amount of oatmeal set to cook. This was slow going as the wood fire took time to heat up to cooking temperature. While this was under way, I would go to the barn and water and feed the horses. I would climb the barn stairs and pour the oats and corn down the chutes into the mangers with a couple of forksful of hay from the loft nearby. Horses are very intelligent animals, so watering consisted simply of unhooking the rope that penned them in the stall and letting them out to help themselves.

Now it was time to return to the house where the rest of the family would have a full breakfast under way. Electric toasters were unheard of and canned juices had not yet appeared so we had to squeeze the juice from fresh oranges and warm the bread in the oven. Usually bacon and eggs and sausage and milk made up the rest of the menu. What we today call hashed brown potatoes, i.e., fried, were a frequent addition to the meal. On weekends baked beans furnished a nourishing supplement as well.

My father then excused himself and going to the barn, he would roll the meat wagons around down a slight incline to the staging area next to the basement meat market that constituted the northern half of our cellar area. Hired men would now arrive and load the meat carts for their daily rounds in which trips were made to Powder Point and the Village on one set of days and to South Duxbury and Island Creek on others. Customers had large colored cards they would place in a window facing the street to show a desire for the meat wagon to stop. Cards were used in this way for ice, groceries, and milk so peddlers would know when to stop. A Saturday task for us was scrubbing out these meat carts so they would be fresh and clean for the following week's deliveries.

Meanwhile, preparations were under way upstairs for lunches to carry to school. These were mostly sandwiches made from thick and heavy but very nourishing bread. Monday sandwiches were frequently made of baked beans served for dinner Saturday night as well as Sunday morning breakfast. Anyone who has eaten a baked bean sandwich with molasses and mustard flavor can never forget it. As with oatmeal, it had to have the quality we used to call "sticking to the ribs."

I pause now to describe the making of "home-baked bread." Of course no one ever heard of "store-bought" bread; every family made their own supply usually on

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, June 26, 1996

Saturday. When I think of the labor that women had to put out to run a household in these days, I am simply appalled. The preparing of meals, long-range planning for food preparation, making and repairing of clothes – all done by the mother of the family not including sudden demands like sickness requiring hours of bedside nursing, if the family size was 5 children as was the custom, this looking back seems really impossible.

Making batter for the bread was my specialty on Friday nights because there was no homework for the next day. I spell this out in some detail to explain how very different that age was from this, in which frozen foods (prepared for eating in minutes), canned vegetables, and soups (now just as tasty as what we can put up in jars from our own garden produce), have made kitchen life so different.

First, mother would get the 10-quart bucket out from under the sink and attach the kneading mechanism, which consisted of a flat strip of metal placed across the top of the bucket – a curved metal rod that went down the length of the container and a long handle with a knob at the end with which to grind. Now with a small bag of flour at hand, mother would pour the flour in cupful by cupful alternating with tablespoonsful of liquid yeast while I ground until the whole reached the size of a football. This was then placed beside the stove with a towel over it to rise overnight and fill the entire pail, often to overflowing. Then the dough would be gathered into neat lumps, placed in bread pans and smeared on top with butter and placed beside the crock of baked beans which, having been soaked all Friday night, would be baked in the oven most of the next morning.

Having now packed the sandwiches we were off to the school.

We always had to walk, for no one would think of harnessing and hitching a horse to take us there. These morning walks we were told were good for us, but they sometimes were rather difficult, especially the 2-mile walk to Partridge Academy up Harrison St. where the winter winds penetrated even the thickest clothing – including longjohns. My sister remembers skipping across the ice cakes on Blue Fish River rather than using the strong stone bridge. It was a break in the routine and dangerous enough to furnish some excitement.

Once at school, I enjoyed myself thoroughly. I loved my teachers, as I had periodic crushes on some, and I loved testing my mind and filling my heart with the great stories of our heritage. We had a kind of awe of our teachers at this time, knowing they were messengers of special meaning for our futures. My greatest subject was English literature and grammar, especially the latter. I was fascinated by the way language had become possible in the human race and the correct formulation of sentences to convey subtle shades of meaning. A favorite text at the time that was required reading for us was George Herbert Palmers' *Self Cultivation in English*, which began with the line..."Good English is exact English; a man's words must fit his thoughts like a glove."